



Abortion Rights is a Union Issue!

The union movement has fought long and hard for women's social and economic equality. Unions support choice because we know that women cannot lead equal and productive lives in their workplace, trade union or community unless they are able to control whether or when to have children. But women's freedom of choice is under attack from the Tory's proposed criminal law on abortion.

Pro-choice supporters reject this new law because:

- It denies women the right to decide for themselves.
- We saw with the old law what happens when hospitals and doctors control access to abortion. Medical decisions are arbitrary and inconsistent and access to this essential health service is inevitably unequal.
- The government wants to restrict access to abortion while cutting back funding for vital preventive measures such as birth control services and refusing to address the crisis of access to abortion.
- The union movement supports choice on abortion because we know that it is the most disadvantaged women who suffer the most when access is limited: working class women, poor women, women of colour, young women and those from the many regions of the country and province with no abortion care at all.

Four things are needed to win freedom of choice:

- First of all, this law must be withdrawn. There is no place for abortion in the Criminal Code. For individual women abortion is a vital question of personal choice and autonomy. For society as a whole abortion is a matter of health policy, not criminal law.
- The federal government already has all the legislation it needs. It can use the [Canada Health Act](#) to force reluctant provinces to provide the necessary access to abortion, as it did to end extra-billing.
- The best way to ensure free and equal access to reproductive health care is to create a network of publicly funded clinics providing abortion services and multilingual and multicultural counselling.
- We also need social policies that support women's choice to have children: universal daycare, community midwifery, parental leave, affordable housing and economic equality for women.

The different struggles we fight are interconnected. This is the same government that is attacking working people through the sales tax, free trade and cutbacks.

Here is how unionists can get involved in the pro-choice fight-back:

- Pro-choice groups across the country are planning a major demonstration in Ottawa in the new year. Get your local to sponsor a bus - even better fill a bus.
- Donate to the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC)
- Invite an OCAC speaker to your local or community group.
- Wear your CHOICE button or T shirt - Let's keep our majority visible.

For information on how to get involved contact the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics,
PO Box 753, Stn P, Toronto, M5S 2Z1 or call 416-969-8463



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Editorials

New abortion bill: A retrograde move

The federal government has taken an enormous step backward with its proposed abortion law that denies a woman's basic right to end a pregnancy and puts the whole issue back in the Criminal Code.

To compound the matter, the law would do absolutely nothing to guarantee women across the country equal access to the procedure.

The Mulroney government was put in the predicament of coming up with a new law when the Supreme Court of Canada, in last year's landmark Morgentaler decision, declared the old law unconstitutional.

In that ruling, the court expressed full confidence in the ability of Canadian women to make responsible reproductive choices by **themselves**.

As Chief Justice Brian Dickson wrote: "Forcing a woman, by threat of criminal sanction, to carry a fetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her own priorities and aspirations, is a profound interference with a woman's body and thus an infringement of security of the person."

Despite this, the government opted for its misguided compromise. Not only does it take away a woman's right to decide, it will in all likelihood force both women and their doctors to lie and risk criminal prosecution.

If Parliament passes this bill, a woman could be jailed for up to two years for misrepresenting her physical, mental or psychological state to her doctor. Furthermore, the doctor could be jailed as well. And other doctors could be discouraged from performing an uncomplicated medical procedure, by threats of criminal charges or civil suits.

Astonishingly, even after last summer's Dodd and Daigle debacles, in which women seeking abortions were dragged into court by ex-lovers, Ottawa seems ready to leave women and doctors open to harassment and humiliation.

How long will it be before an angry husband or boyfriend, or some meddling outsider, persuades a judge that there are grounds to lay a charge, causing police to swoop down on a doctor's office with a search warrant?

Those women who want an abortion for social or economic reasons would also be forced to lie, because those wouldn't be legitimate reasons under this proposal. Likewise, sympathetic doctors will be forced to look the other way — and risk criminal prosecution.

What good is a law that makes people dishonest? And what good is a federal law that encourages a checkerboard of contradictory and arbitrary provincial controls that could deny women equal access to safe, timely abortions?

In this glaring absence of federal leadership, the reproductive rights of Canadian women will depend on geographical boundaries and the vagaries of provincial politics. What an appalling cop-out.